# Leadership & Environment:
# Perspectives of Our Journey Through the Post-Modern Era.

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## ABSTRACT

During this post-modern era, leadership orientation must be rooted in deeper, more spiritual values, which can take us forward through the changes of this changing world as we grapple with increasing level of complexity and paradox within the human environment. This paper has explained the leadership process with 'Interactional Framework' of Leader, Followers and Situation and concluded that the relationship of leaders and followers depends on the personal attributes of the leader as strong leaders are centred in themselves, not self-centred.

Our intensive lifestyle has fragmented our views; we speak about environment as something separated from us while forgetting that we live in it. Our environmental leaders should be enlightened by the ancient philosophy of 'wilderness' to transpire the inspirational power of the whole living in them.

As non-returning migrants, our consciousness of social inequity has led our journey through the religious education to Marxism, Nietzsche's ideas and Social Darwinism, of the developing and the developed horizons; where the leadership concepts may provide us with a new metaphor of self-exploration. The author concluded that the leaders of the 21$^{st}$ century must know how to harness the wild and drastic change of the underlying beliefs and ethics of the past and move towards the congenial co-existence of all life forms for a sustainable future.

## KEY WORDS
Leadership, leader, ecosystem, environment, change, self, sustainability

## INTRODUCTION

'Success — even survival — today requires ongoing change. The challenge of a leader is to be a positive instrument of change' (Cole n.d. cited in Salisbury 1996). Positive change can occur when people with different perspectives are organised into groups in which everyone is regarded as a peer. There must also be high level of involvement, a clear purpose, adequate resources and the power to decide and implement as described by Parr 1994 (cited in Lucas et al 1998). This is the underpinning philosophy of leadership of the post-modern world, where having the

intention of improving a situation, accomplishing a task or implementing a common purpose is part of the change process (Lucas et al. 1998) and leadership is considered as 'an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes' (Rost 1991).

This essay explores the meanings and philosophies of leadership in the context of change in the changing world, how they affect and influence the environment of a particular setting and how they relate with particular views and epistemology. Accordingly, I have tried to appraise and analyse the meaning, concept and effectiveness of leadership in our journey through time and space with the help of the views of different authors. I have also tried to critique and assess our logical and ethical foundation as professional natural resource managers together with our position as leaders or followers in our own arena of existence within the environment.

## A CALL FOR CHANGE

In our journey, we are going through a time when more than 20% of the world's inhabitants live in acute poverty in which they lack access to an adequate diet, decent housing, basic sanitation, clean water, education, medical care and other essentials of human existence. Seventy percent of those people are women and children. Four out of five people in the world live in what would be considered poverty in the USA and Canada. The plight of these poor people is not just a humanitarian concern. Policy makers are becoming aware that eliminating poverty and protecting our common environment are inextricably interlinked, because poorest people are too often forced to meet short-term survival needs at the cost of long-term environmental quality (Cunningham and Saigo 1999).

On the other hand, rich urban societies of the world are overstressing and draining the earth's natural capital through their lavish lifestyle and we are moving towards 'ecological overshoot' (Ede 2002). 'Overshoot' is when human demand exceeds nature's supply at the local, national or global scale (Wackernagel and Rees 1996 cited in Ede 2002). Has this situation been avoided by mankind? The answer is 'no'. Recent research indicates that our ecological overshoot started in the late 1970s and has continued to widen (Hall 2002).

> *Human demand for resources in 1961 stood about 70% of the earth's sustainable capacity. By the 1970s, it had risen to match the global supply, and in 1999 exceeded it by 20%* **(Henderson 2002).**

The reason for this is not at all hard to explain. The ecological footprint (natural resource consumption and waste generation) of countries such as New Zealand, USA, Australia and Canada are 9.8, 8.4, 8.1 and 7.0 ha/capita respectively, whereas world average is only 2.3 ha/capita (ABS 2001).

We need to question the leadership assumptions of local to global context that have led us to where we are today. We are passing through a time of major struggle and also of great potential, a time for breaking through patterns of behaviour that no longer add value but rather keep us in the ways of the past. People all over the world

are realising that our societies and institutions can no longer operate effectively with assumptions and beliefs designed for an age long gone (Spencer 2004). Our world is becoming increasingly complex and change can no longer be viewed as an event. Rather it has to be seen as a self-generating process, pushing us ever more swiftly in the direction of a new way of living and working together as a global society. We need a leadership orientation that is rooted in deeper, more spiritual values and one that takes into account the full spectrum of the human experience. A leadership that will take us forward as we grapple with increasing levels of complexity and paradox. Leadership should be deeply rooted into the demand of present time which is supposed to be structured by the notion of

> *'learning to lead is learning how to carry out the tasks without undermining the group, in its cohesiveness'* **(Dimitrov and Lederer 2003).**

## LEADERSHIP

Let us explore the conceptual meaning of 'Leadership' at the beginning, which has been an important issue for centuries. During the era of ancient Rome and the days of Attila the Hun, the effect of leadership was often been measured in blood. At that time, individuals with absolute authority, carrying the biggest 'stick', the strongest troops or the most modern weapons were considered effective leaders (Crawford and Brungardt 1999). But today leadership is considered as a function of the group and the leaders are a function of leadership. When the functioning of a group is healthy, we identify individuals within the group as leaders and when a group is functioning pathologically, we decry a lack of leadership (McKereghan 1997).

There are some 850 definitions of leadership (Warren Bennis n.d. cited in Leadership Advantage 2001). They range from the inspirational to operational. Leadership is 'like art, you can't define what it is, but you know it when you see it' (Leadership Advantage 2001). This supports the notion that 'if we already know the definition, there would seem to be no reason to need to extract the definition from examples of it'- Plato (McKereghan 1997). A comprehensive and helpful definition of leadership has been proposed by Roach and Behling (1984) as 'the process of influencing an organized group toward accomplishing its goals' (cited in Hughes et al. 1993). Under this definition, leadership is a social influence process shared among all members of a group and is not restricted to the influence exerted by one person in a particular position or role; followers are also part of the leadership process (Hughes et al. 1993).

The leadership process can be described with a framework, based mainly on Hollander's transactional approach to leadership —'interactional framework'.

LEADER

PERSONALITY
POSITION
EXPERTISE, ETC

VALUES
NORMS
COHESIVENESS,
ETC.

TASK
STRESS
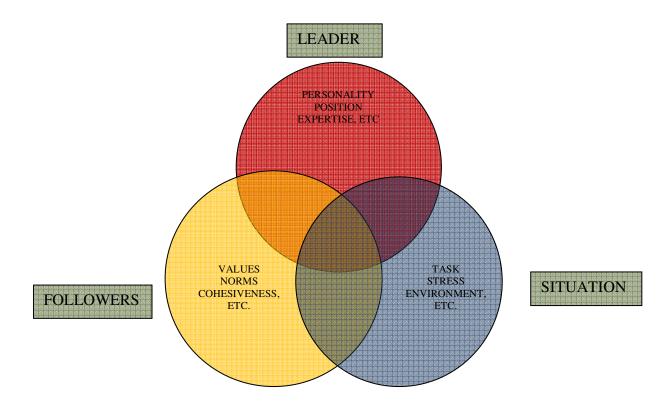ENVIRONMENT,
ETC.

FOLLOWERS

SITUATION

Figure 1        Interactional framework for analysing leadership (source Hughes et al., 1993)

The framework depicts leadership as a function of three elements—the leader, the followers and the situation. A leadership scenario can be examined using each level of analysis separately. According to Hughes et al (1993) this is a useful way to understand the leadership process, but we can have an even better understanding of the process if we also examine the interactions between the three elements, or lenses, represented by the overlapping areas (see Figure 1). In other words, we can better understand the leadership process if we not only look at the leaders and followers but also at how leaders and followers affect each other in the leadership process. Similarly we can analyse the leader and the situation separately, but we can gain even further understanding of the leadership process by looking at how the situation can facilitate or constrain a leader's actions and how that leader can change different aspects of the situation in order to be more effective.

However, if we focus on the relationship between leader and followers, we need to analyse the personal attributes of the leader. 'It has been said that to be a good leader one must first of all be a good follower' (Walters 1987). Dimitrov (2003) notes that a crowd (denoted as the public or the majority) cannot tolerate individuals who behave differently from the majority and if the leaders do not express what the crowd wants and fight for, they will be automatically rejected. The crowd does not like individuals who see and speak only truth. They feel irritated, uncomfortable, insecure and even frightened when they find someone who knows more about their lives than they alone

know. On the contrary, strong leaders are centred in themselves—not self-centred, in the sense of being selfish, but rather always rest inwardly (Walters 1987).

> *Individuals, who honestly seek to penetrate into the essence of their own lives and uncover the potential hidden in this essence, do not strive to become leaders of the crowd……without striving to become leaders, they attract people through the way they are, through the examples of their own lives, through the way they relate to people and the environment.* **(Dimitrov 2003)**

## ENVIRONMENT

Let me tell you a story. Recently I attended an environmental course a curriculum review meeting of a local university where a group of stakeholders proposed to replace the word 'environment' with 'sustainability'. They were concerned that the word 'environment' had lost its empirical meaning; and that it caused a haze of political confusion in local communities. They are not practically wrong; we all have experienced how our contemporary political leaders have successfully turned the word 'environment' into a political sham, leaving the real meaning as a myth. As a result we forget that the word is the lifeline of our existence, the bottom line of the future of human species. For this reason we must understand the real meaning of 'environment' before we understand our own perspective.

As a matter of fact, the word environment has been derived from the French word 'environner', meaning to encircle or surround. Cunningham and Saigo (1999) define 'environment' as the circumstances or conditions that surround an organism or group of organisms. Or the complex of social or cultural conditions that affect an individual or community. They further state that since humans inhabit the natural world as well as the 'constructed'—the technological, social, and cultural world—all of them constitute important parts of the environment (Figure 2).
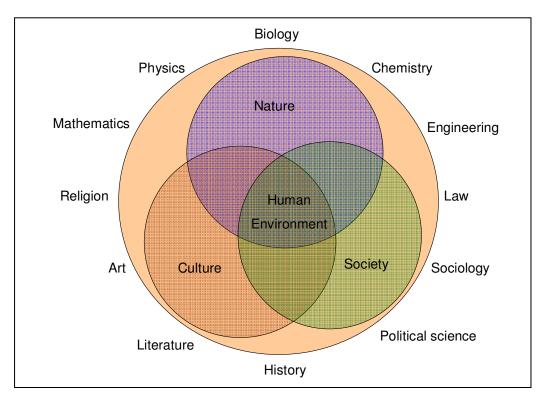
Figure 2. Intersection of the natural world with the social and cultural worlds encompass our environment (Source: Cunningham and Saigo 1999)

But in our fragmented world, knowledge has also become fragmented. Our society has become alienated and insulated from nature. This alienation leads us to speak about environment as something separate from us and we need to establish a friendly relationship with it, forgetting that we live in it and, that without sustaining it, we cannot prevail or prosper. When the human species strives to dominate in nature, and riches strive to dominate in society, the rhythm of natural and social self-organization becomes distorted (Dimitrov 2003). Ecological and social disasters then emerge with negative effects on human health, on the health of the society, and on the health of the whole planet. The natural world appears to renew itself when left alone and when all elements of the ecosystem participate (Johnson 1999). Messing with nature in the name of management can have disastrous consequences.

Our leaders should recognise the potential for the philosophy of wilderness, as the ancient Chinese culture defines 'Tao' and recognise wilderness as a place where wild potential is fully expressed, a diversity of living and non-living beings flourish according to their own order and dynamics. They need to believe '*to speak of wilderness is to speak of wholeness*' (Snyder 1990 cited in Johnson 1999). They must embrace the essence of working in harmony with nature and the interconnectedness of life, to develop an ecological ethic (Johnson 1999). They must be capable of integrating their genuine experience of the existential whole—the experience of its rhythm and harmony, its infinity in space and time, and its urge to create and transform into their individual consciousness. They should also be able to express this holistic consciousness in their daily life and transpire its inspirational power to others.

## OURSELVES

Well, now let us look into our own perspectives. One of the most important aspects of our personal development is the way in which we see ourselves. As a child grows, they become aware through their experiences, initially within the family and later in society, of who and what they are (Challoner n.d.). Mead (cited in Challoner n.d.) stated that although the self acts differently in different settings, there is an underlying unified self and this realisation is unavoidable if we believe in the construct of global self-esteem.

In general, our middle class family background was the main driving force to create self-consciousness at the earliest stage of our self-development according to Challenger's views. This consciousness blends with the foundation of our ethical structure, backbone of our moral character and logical formwork of our flexibility to be the follower and leader in the changing circumstances of our lives and environment. But social inequity of the developing world as in our country of origin, urged our subconscious mind to find a myriad of logical answers. We may become

inclined toward Marxism and critically believe that history was structured by changes in economic relationships. As Stevenson (1998) described, economic forces that determine people's social relationships also influence the way people think, and this is limited and structured by the way we meet our material needs. In a semi-conservative, hierarchical and irrational economic context of our societies of our country of origin, we open our inner eyes with mainstream religious education that man is an animal endowed with a divine spirit and that divine spirit separates him from his animal instinct (The Quran cited in Naqvi 2010); or similarly, without 'dharma' man is no better than a beast (Swami Brahmeshananda 2010). But unknowingly we also embrace Social Darwinism which states that man has renounced the satisfaction of some desires of his natural destructive instincts which are incompatible with social life and has given priority to the satisfaction of those desires which can be realised under a system of the division of labour. He has entered upon the way toward civilisation, social cooperation and wealth (Ludwig von Mises Institute 2004).

A careful in-depth view on these common notions clearly reveals the similarity of our epistemological standpoints with Nietzsche's idea of 'the will to power' through one way or the other. Nietzsche said,

> '……..*do you want a name for this world? A solution for all its riddles? A light for you, too, you best concealed, strongest, most intrepid, most midnightly men?—This world is the will to power—and nothing besides! And you yourselves are also this will to power—and nothing besides'* (cited in Denneson n.d).

For this reason, a critical view of the generic framework of 'sustainability' indicates that we are placing too much emphasis on economic aspects rather than other imperatives of environment. This emphasis has created a narrow monetary system of values and concentrated power in the hand of those with large amounts of money (Hill 1999). We must change this ethical paradigm; otherwise the concept of the 'three legged stool' of sustainability will be futile. Self-centred and short-sighted western leadership never liked the report of the Brundtland Commission which opens a deep fissure in the bedrock of conventional economic thinking (Ellwood 2000). No wonder western capitalist leadership will try their best to cripple the idea of 'sustainable development' or sustaining the environment through their control over the macro level policy mechanism.

We have to develop our ability to see 'messages' in life's events and reveal their meaning not as separated and sporadically emerging phenomena but in connection with one another. We need to keep ourselves open for the life-supporting power of nature so that we are able to discriminate between natural and artificial, authentic and pretentious, genuine and illusive, right and wrong, and true and false. In this way we can develop our consciousness—understanding life's lessons and being able to commune deeply with nature. This is the right time for us to develop the power to cope with 'will to power' syndrome. We need to construct an individual self-organization to reach its creative apotheosis with real, authentic dynamics. At the

same time we should remember that any imitation of or following other people's behaviour or borrowing other people's knowledge and skill decreases the chance for finding our own way for self-realisation. This is the challenge of the post-modern time for each of us to become 'apotropaic leaders' of our own life (Dimitrov 2003).

As qualified professionals of any discipline or capacity of this postmodern era, we may as well recognise ourselves as professional leaders. As Seaver (1968) says
*'In a democratic society he is a paid expert, be he a teacher, preacher, organizer or extension agent. And of course, these are just a few of many possible fields of professional leadership.'*
A professional leader must bring sufficient competence to the organisation to define more clearly its functions and to carry on those functions in the society. Professional leadership is a two-way process- in one way they are the follower when they are given feedback from the organisation but in the other way they act as the leader when they work in the society to achieve change. But what makes professional leaders successful are their professional ethics, motivation and understanding about the change they impose on the society under the umbrella of our common environment.

## OUR JOURNEY

As non-returning emigrant, our journey from our country of origin to a new land with new perspectives involved structuring and restructuring the foundation of our ethical motivation, formwork of our knowledge, pavement of our outlook and reinforcement of our moral courage. I strongly believe that this is more spiritual than a physical journey. It is more motivational than opportunistic, global rather than local. The concept of leadership provides a new metaphor to our self-exploration, without that we would not be able to analyse our own perspectives. Let that be the kick-start and let that self exploration continue for the rest of our life.

On our journey, we have seen the shameless corruption of an irrational economy and consequent extreme poverty; we may have noticed how absolute monarchy wastes public resources and produces insecurity. We have seen exploitation and suppression of the working class in the name of social security, social egalitarianism and liberalism. We may have seen professional leaders with proper values who cannot get through the bureaucratic hierarchy due to its unethical foundations and we have seen how the majority groups of the society look down on the minority groups. We may ask ourselves 'why do these anomalies exist and where is the bottom line or whether they are not really anomalous at all?' Maybe they are only the outcome of 'will to power' or Social Darwinism of human societies. Where are the leaders who will instigate the paradigm shift towards congenial co-existence of all life forms under the umbrella of sustainable environment of our planet? They should be armed with the characteristics of the twenty-first century's leadership with appropriate vision and integrity; they should be balanced in their judgement and actions as well as balanced with themself (Sanddish and Kroon, n.d. cited in Kane n.d.).

## CONCLUSION

Isn't it the cruel and hypocritical game of our religious and political leaders to turn simpleminded people against each other to achieve their narrow and selfish goals when the world is going through a critical time of paradigm shift? Let us do something for our sick and warming planet, let us do something for our societies- for distressed humanity, let us remember our roots and do something for our ever-resilient country of origin and let us do something for our own psyche. Let us do something to create a sense of satisfaction, a sense of belonging to our identity, our own existence. Our life is brief; let us find the meaning and purpose of it. Our pattern of life has been changing to cope with the rapidly changing world. Subsequently our epistemological standpoint is also going through a drastic revision and reorganisation. Underlying beliefs and ethics of all types of systems are disintegrating and dissolving and a new form of ethical structure is rushing out from the wreckage to take over. Leaders of twenty-first century need to harness this wild change and move towards a future of congenial coexistence of all life forms on our planet. According to Spencer (2004),

> *"There is no greater gift that we can give to the world than the loving acceptance of our own soul's journey. That is all it takes and that is what it takes. The choice is our's, to continue along the path of the past, or accept the invitation to engage in the definition of leadership for the Relationship Age".*

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